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ABSTRACT

In December 1998, approximately 100 researchers, policymakers, practitioners, and other specialists in the field of fathers and families convened the Welfare Reform, Fathers, and Families Roundtable to explore the potential of enabling services for low-income, noncustodial fathers in the context of welfare reform and child support enforcement. This report synthesizes the discussion of the themes of the meeting and their implications for policymaking, the directions they indicate for future research, and the lessons they impart for practice. The first section of this report describes the current and emerging issues in welfare reform, child support enforcement, and fatherhood initiatives. The second section explores the implications of the issues raised for policymaking. The third section offers new directions for research that arose from the discussion, and the fourth section describes lessons learned for practice. The report concludes with the roundtable agenda and a list of participants. (KB)

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Fathers and Families Second-Tier Roundtable Series

The Welfare Reform, Fathers, and Families Roundtable

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Introduction

The Welfare Reform, Fathers, and Families Roundtable—first in the National Center on Fathers and Families' (NCOFF) second tier of roundtables—initiated a new focus on policy issues related to NCOFF's seven Core Learnings. The first tier focused on defining the Core Learnings, based on the experiences of practitioners found to be resonant with research. Approximately 100 researchers, policymakers, practitioners, and other specialists in the field of fathers and families gathered at The Urban Institute in Washington, D.C., on December 8, 1998, to explore the potential of enabling services for low-income, noncustodial fathers in the context of welfare reform and child support enforcement.

Child support will remain an elusive commodity unless services are provided to enable low-income, noncustodial fathers to obtain—and maintain—jobs that allow them to meet their financial obligations.

As welfare reform moves low-income, custodial mothers off assistance rolls and into the workplace, reliable and substantial child support becomes critical to a successful quest for self-sufficiency. However, child support will remain an elusive commodity unless services are provided to enable low-income, noncustodial fathers to obtain—and maintain—jobs that allow them to meet their financial obligations. Beyond financial support, social services agencies can improve outcomes for children by increasing the capacity of noncustodial fathers to care for their children's emotional needs as well.

"More than ever before, we have come to realize the need for services for low-income fathers," said Elaine Sorensen of The Urban Institute. "Our chance today is to consider what services are needed, who should be providing these services, and how child support enforcement (CSE) agencies can provide such support."

The primary goals of the meeting, as for all of the second-tier roundtable discussions, were to: (1) present a comprehensive analysis of issues and problems that have been identified in the literature; (2) deepen the discourse between and among researchers, practitioners, and policymakers around the identified issues; (3) engage participants in the development of a research agenda, as an initial activity in a longer-term research study; (4) move the field and the roundtable past discussion and the presentation of ideas to focus intensively on sound research and sustain practice-driven research efforts; and (5) involve practitioners in meaningful ways in the conceptualization of research projects pursued by NCOFF and others in the field.

Commenters delivered brief presentations and led participants in a discussion of issues related to the following questions:

- What should the child support enforcement (CSE) role be in providing enabling services to poor families?
- How can enabling services for poor fathers be funded? Who should control that funding?
- Should there be incentives (like the pass-through) within the CSE system and elsewhere to encourage low-income, noncustodial fathers and custodial mothers to "play by the rules"?

Panelists and participants also deliberated new directions for research and practice, as well as implications for policy-

making, guided by the following questions:

- What evidence is still needed to convince constituencies focused on welfare, child, and family support to generate policy around the role, funding, and incentives of the CSE system?
- What do we know in the areas of research and policy that can strengthen practice?

Several overarching themes emerged from the discussion:

- In the context of welfare reform and the devolution of decision-making and dollars to the state-level, there is tremendous opportunity for advocates to initiate, fund, and implement well-targeted fatherhood initiatives.
- The primary goal of fatherhood initiatives should be to improve the well-being of children.
- A father's provision of emotional support is as critical as his financial support.
- Practitioners, policymakers, and researchers must recognize that most fathers fail to pay child support because they cannot—rather than will not—meet their obligations.
- To afford child support, many low-income, noncustodial fathers require education, training, job search, and job placement assistance, as well as services that help them to maintain family-supporting jobs and eliminate legal and financial barriers to sustainable employment.
- Researchers, practitioners, and policymakers must address the host of unintended consequences and disincentives imbedded in the CSE system, which often prevent—rather than promote—fathers' involvement in the lives of their children.
- The CSE system must become not only more father-friendly but also more mother- and parent-friendly, requiring cultural change at the frontlines of service provision.
- In implementing comprehensive fatherhood initiatives at the local level, effective coordination among participating agencies is essential to delivering integrated services; in addition, other actors, such as community-based and other nonprofit organizations, might be better suited to serve as program coordinators than state agencies.
- Policy debates around fatherhood initiatives, welfare reform, and child support enforcement must be broadened to explore the delivery of holistic services to mothers and fathers, the coordination of services between parents, and the consideration of culturally-specific concerns in program design.

This report synthesizes the discussion of these themes and their implications for policymaking, the directions they indicate for future research, and the lessons they impart for practice. The first section of this report describes the current and emerging issues in welfare reform, child support enforcement, and fatherhood initiatives. The second section explores the implications of the issues raised for policymaking. The third section offers new directions for research that arose from the discussion, and the final section describes lessons learned for practice.

Beyond financial support, social services agencies can improve outcomes for children by increasing the capacity of noncustodial fathers to care for their emotional needs.

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Current and Emerging Issues in Welfare Reform, Child Support Enforcement, and Fatherhood Initiatives

In launching the roundtable, Judge David Gray Ross from the Federal Office of Child Support Enforcement underscored the need to fund policy-informing research and fatherhood initiatives, with the ultimate goal of improving the lives of children and families. "Children are first. And while fatherhood initiatives are very important," Ross cautioned, "we still need to address the cost issues—how do you fund these efforts and what are the trade-offs?" The difficulty, according to Ross, involves the real benefits of fatherhood and family programs that do not translate into dollars and cents or any quantifiable measure. However, he believes that this roundtable, and other efforts like it, have already advanced the debate around developing productive and cost-effective fatherhood initiatives.

To frame the roundtable's discussion, John Monahan of the Administration for Children and Families at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services identified the current policy issues that dominate the federal debate. "The subject of promoting the capacity and involvement of fathers—particularly low-income fathers—in the economic and emotional support of their children is difficult to resolve," he said, "because it runs into three of the most complicated issues we are currently working on in this country." According to Monahan, those issues include the following:

1. **Creating holistic supports for former welfare recipients.** In the aftermath of welfare reform and the imposition of timelines for aid recipients, helping low-income working families become self-sufficient requires supports beyond employment services, including assistance with child care, transportation, and child support enforcement. For example, the results of the Parents' Fair Share Demonstration are clearly sobering: while some sites experienced increases in child support collection, overall they did not markedly improve the economic well-being of non-custodial parents. The results do not imply abandoning such efforts, but they do indicate a need to identify different programmatic methods that make a difference.

2. **Understanding the nature of parent-child involvement.** If any fatherhood or family initiative seeks to improve outcomes for children, it must examine how to improve the involvement of both parents in their children's lives from birth through their teenage years. In that light, the CSE system must be examined both as an economic support and in conjunction with access to visitation. How can these two systems interact to make a difference?

3. **Improving the economic prospects of young, low-income fathers with limited skills.** The structure of the low-skilled, low-wage labor market in the United States presents serious challenges for workers not only to support themselves but also to provide significant and reliable support for their children. The grim prospects in the current economy for these workers begs an important, but difficult, policy question for fatherhood initiatives: What is the right mix of services and opportunities that will make a difference economically in these workers' lives so that they can, by extension, positively affect the lives of their children?

Roundtable participants explored three issues within the context of federal and state welfare reform efforts: (1) father-enabling functions within the CSE system; (2) possible sources of funding for fatherhood programs; and (3) incentives within the CSE system to improve participation. The remainder of this section highlights the issues that emerged from commenters' presentations and the ensuing discussions.

Child Support Enforcement: Father-Enabling Functions

QUESTION

What should the child support enforcement role be in providing enabling services to poor families?

COMMENTERS:

Dianna Durham-McLoud, National Center for Strategic Non-Profit Planning and Community Leadership

Linda Stewart, Secretary of the Department of Workforce Development, State of Wisconsin

In discussing this question, commenters and roundtable participants explored the following four issues: (1) addressing the CSE system's antiquated design; (2) providing employment and training assistance for low-income fathers; (3) creating mother-, father-, and family-friendly services; and (4) streamlining existing social services within the CSE system.

Addressing an Antiquated Design. "When we look at child support's role in this new and expanding policy universe, it is helpful to step back and remember what 'the program' was," said Dianna Durham-McLoud of the National Center for Strategic Non-Profit Planning and Community Leadership. "That was the culture in America when Title IV was inserted into the Social Security Act."

When Title IV was originally enacted, 80 percent or more of the women receiving assistance from Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) were either divorced from or deserted by their husbands. Thirty years later, however, the largest segment of the AFDC program's growth would be for unwed parents, so that the establishment of paternity—which in earlier years was a given—became a major barrier to the establishment of child support orders.

"The focus now is on a population that was not intended to be the core population served," Durham-McLoud said. "A system designed to assist divorced and widowed mothers is now serving mothers with children who have

Title IV of the Social Security Act

Title IV of the Social Security Act, "Grants to States for Aid and Services to Needy Families with Children and for Child-Welfare Services," provides funding to states for a range of social services.

Title IV increases the flexibility of states in operating programs designed to: (1) provide assistance to needy families so that children may be cared for in their own homes or in the homes of relatives; (2) end the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage; (3) prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies and establish annual numerical goals for preventing and reducing the incidence of these pregnancies; and (4) encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.

Part A of Title IV establishes block grants to states for temporary assistance to needy families. Part B allocates federal dollars for child and family services agencies. Part D funds child support enforcement and establishment of paternity programs, and Part E appropriates federal payments for foster care and adoption assistance.

never been married. It's a different demographic, and no surprise that the system is not working smoothly."

One of the system's key problems is that it ignores the issue of fathers' access to visitation—one of the primary reasons fathers cite for their delinquent payments. David Arnaudo of the Office of Child Support Enforcement in Washington, D.C. recalled a conversation he had with local intake workers about the office's Responsible Fathers and Visitation Access initiatives. "These frontline workers were relieved that someone was finally addressing the issue," Arnaudo said. "In many cases, intake workers are left with no way to respond to these impasses between mothers and fathers."

Durham-McLoud mentioned that the state of Illinois has started to address the access problem, offering some recourse for fathers. "Legislation has been repeatedly introduced that provides for action against mothers who refuse visitation," she said, "without taking things back into domestic court and eliciting court involvement in enforcing visitation rights."

"A system designed to assist divorced and widowed mothers is now serving mothers with children who have never been married. It's a different demographic, and no surprise that the system is not working smoothly," said Durham-McLoud.

According to Linda Stewart, secretary of the Department of Workforce Development in Wisconsin, addressing access is an essential step in updating an outdated social services system. "There has been insufficient emphasis on the role of the father. When child support orders are issued, there is no requirement up front that parents work together and that the father has access to his child," said Stewart. She has been involved in efforts to address this oversight, including taking suggestions made by fathers on changing the language of child support orders to the courts. Those alterations would include a requirement that parents work together around visitation and support.

Providing Employment and Training Assistance. "CSE agencies should have a role in addressing the barriers that low-income fathers face in paying child support and making a connection to their children," said Stewart. A 38 percent collection rate on child support payments—a rate that exceeds the national average—demonstrates the success of Wisconsin's comprehensive approach.

Several fatherhood initiatives are underway in Wisconsin, two of which directly link job search and training with other state agencies. For example, one initiative—a teen parenting demonstration project—represents a partnership between the state, the local Goodwill Industries organization, and the local CSE agency to provide low-income, noncustodial fathers with job search and educational opportunities. The program, headed by Jerry Hamilton, also offers guidance to fathers on developing a relationship with mothers to resolve conflicts and work together for the good of their children.

Many states have taken the lead in addressing chronic un- or underemployment among noncustodial fathers by linking welfare reform, the CSE system, and employment and training opportunities for low-income dads.

A second Wisconsin initiative involves a partnership with the state's corrections department to provide recently released fathers with education and job search assistance, in addition to a structured parenting program. "The aim is to help fathers coming out of prison to make a connection with their children as they are also transitioning into the workforce," said Stewart. She believes that establishing such a meaningful relationship serves as an important way to prevent sons from following their fathers into the correctional system.

An evaluation of new CSE initiatives in Cook County, Illinois, found that 56 percent of the fathers who appeared in court to show cause said they would

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gladly pay child support if they were employed and if their wages were sufficient to support themselves and their families. "We found young men who were making less than $5,000 per year," Durham-McLoud said. "Some had no visible means of support."

The Cook County evaluation, along with other accounts, points to the central problem in CSE systems: chronic un- or underemployment among low-income, noncustodial fathers. Many states, Wisconsin in particular, have taken the lead in addressing this problem by linking welfare reform, the CSE system, and employment and training opportunities for low-income dads.

Creating Mother-, Father-, and Family-Friendly Services. For years, the AFDC system discouraged parents from working together for the good of their children—and also discouraged two-parent families from seeking help. According to Stewart, "The most exciting thing about welfare reform is that it addresses the entire family structure and doesn't just focus on mothers and children." In fact, while the focus remains on improving the lives of children, that end is achieved in new approaches by working with all members of the family.

Participants agreed that agencies must not only support mothers and children, but approach service provision from the perspective of making it a father-friendly system. "You can't just say to fathers, 'Pay your order,' or 'Get a job,' without providing the additional supports they need to access employment and training," said Stewart.

Father-friendly points of contact with CSE officers are also required, as well as notification documents that describe fathers' responsibilities plainly, rather than in legalese. "While we don't need one-size-fits-all programming," said Durham-McLoud, "child support agencies should be called upon to help design, monitor, evaluate, and refine a system of services that provide an easy on-ramp for fathers who need them."

Paula Roberts of the Center for Law and Social Policy cautioned that discussions of involving fathers should not preclude improving services for mothers—for entire families—as well. "It's important to recognize that the mothers in the child support system don't find it particularly friendly or welcome either," she said. "One of our tasks is to begin a dialogue around building a family-friendly system."

"The most exciting thing about welfare reform is that it addresses the entire family structure and doesn't just focus on mothers and children," said Stewart. While the focus remains on improving the lives of children, that end is achieved in new approaches by working with all members of the family.

Coordinating and Streamlining Services. In order to build family-friendly systems, agencies must be granted the flexibility to customize their services. In all of Wisconsin's fatherhood initiatives, the local CSE agency tailors its services to achieve this goal. "Each local community decides what is best for them in terms of how they make services available to fathers and families," said Stewart.

To help the range of participating agencies meet the needs of fathers and families, the state must work to achieve more seamless connections among all of the relevant actors. As a first order of business in the state's fatherhood initiatives, Wisconsin's governor issued an executive order mandating that all state agencies review their policies to determine how they are—or are not—father-friendly. "That includes issues like working with the Department of Transportation to see if there are ways to help fathers get their driver's licenses back in order to go to work," said Stewart. "In many cases, we don't have to reinvent the wheel, but we have to partner to make this happen. No one agency at any level can make this work without doing it together." The fatherhood initiatives also work with community-based organizations (CBOs) to improve service delivery.

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

On October 1, 1996, TANF replaced three federal programs: (1) Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) as the cash assistance program for low-income families, (2) the Emergency Assistance Program, and (3) the JOBS Program. Enacted as Title I of "The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act," TANF is administered by state welfare agencies, whose services are funded by federal block grants.

The centerpieces of this legislation include funding for public and private employment, training, and supportive services for recipients of TANF benefits. States are free to design these services and to set eligibility standards and program goals. While the legislation allows each state considerable flexibility in designing its own work program—for example, tailoring these programs to meet the needs of recipients—every state must ensure that appropriate support services, such as child care, are made available to help recipient overcome employment and training obstacles.

Benefits are capped at 60 months in an adult's lifetime. Cash and medical benefits are only available to families with one or more children under 18 years of age or to pregnant women. A family may include one or two parents in the household.

According to Durham-McLoud, providing referrals to other agencies and systems at various points of contact quite simply makes sense. "It's better for us to intervene than to just let the system run its course," she said. "For example, when you appear to show cause, and you can't do that, incarceration is supposedly the remedy. It costs $37,500 to keep someone in Cook County Correctional for a year, but it costs our program somewhere around $3,000 to provide services to get fathers back on track. Even if you're just a stingy budget cruncher, it still makes more sense."

Part of the difficulty in streamlining CSE, workforce development, and welfare-to-work efforts—as well as strengthening ties among agencies and between agencies and CBOs—lies in the perennial dilemma of inadequate funding.

However, part of the difficulty in streamlining CSE, workforce development, and welfare-to-work efforts—as well as strengthening ties among agencies and between agencies and CBOs—lies in the perennial dilemma of inadequate funding. "Most CSEs want to do more, but the reality is that they already have huge workloads and most of their funding comes from collections," said Stewart. It has become clear that, at both the state and federal levels, additional support must be identified so that CSEs can collaborate with other agencies and CBOs in order to strengthen programs that help fathers obtain skills, enter the workforce, and develop positive and supportive relationships with their children.

Child Support, Welfare Reform, and Workforce Development: Funding for Enabling Services

QUESTION:

How should enabling services for poor dads be financed? Who should control the funding?

COMMENTATORS:

Wade Horn, National Fatherhood Initiative

Wendell Primus, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities

In discussing this question, commenters and roundtable participants explored the following three issues: (1) supporting an expanded mission within the CSE system; (2) assessing current funding options; and (3) exploring alternative ways to administer the funding.

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Supporting an Expanded Mission. As the roundtable's first discussion pointed out, child support enforcement programs must expand their capacity and definition of support—moving beyond a focus on collections and financial assistance to enabling families to offer both financial and emotional support for their children. "While both the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and child support programs are about children, TANF is also about getting mothers into the labor force so that they can support their children," said Wendell Primus of the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. In the same way, Primus continued, child support enforcement systems must change their missions—helping children by assisting low-income dads to enter the workforce and become involved in constructive ways in their children's lives.

To help achieve these goals and prevent inefficiencies in the CSE system, it is essential that resources at the federal and state levels be allocated to coordinate child support enforcement, TANF programs, and fatherhood initiatives. As Wade Horn of the National Fatherhood Initiative said, "while there are more programs for fathers than there were five years ago, most still operate on shoestring budgets—or no budgets at all."

According to Horn, financing enabling services for low-income fathers has three social benefits, making greater public investment worthwhile: they (1) enhance the economic circumstances of single mothers and their children, (2) strengthen the relationships between noncustodial fathers and their children, and (3) create the capacity to strengthen the relationships between parents.

However, participants identified a glaring obstacle to funding expanded services for fathers within the CSE system: child support payments are heavily taxed by the state and serve primarily to support the system itself rather than the families engaged in the system. For example, in California, the tax rate on a father's child support payment is 89 percent; in other words, that father's child sees only 11 percent of his payment—which could represent up to 30 percent or more of his income. In some states, none of a father's payment is passed through to his children. Instead, those dollars are used to finance the CSE system and reimburse state coffers for programs such as food stamps and TANF.

As participants would discuss later, passing as many child support dollars as possible through to families is essential for promoting self-sufficiency. Will states be committed to supplying the additional dollars needed to underwrite the CSE system in order to implement the pass-through? "The dollars collected by the state from fathers' child support payments represent revenue to state governments, and when those dollars are withdrawn for the pass-through, we're left with large financing holes for CSE systems, TANF programs, and local functions," said Vicki Turetsky of the Center for Law and Social Policy. Dianna Durham-McLoud agreed, adding, "Clearly, someone is going to have to make the political decision to provide the funding in order to be responsive to all of the needs that have been articulated, because it's the right thing to do for children. Either the state is going to put out enough dollars, or have enough money credited to the wager, or find other creative ways to resolve the resource issue."

Financing enabling services for low-income fathers enhances the economic circumstances of single mothers and their children, strengthens the relationships between noncustodial fathers and their children, and creates the capacity to strengthen relationships between parents.

Assessing Funding Options. How can enabling services for poor fathers be financed? Primus recommended that, because there is unlimited need, a federal block grant with a state match could serve as one funding channel. In fact, he believes that such a financing structure ensures better program administration, since states can monitor local implementation and rigorously evaluate demonstrations before adopting them as statewide models. "States and localities

are going to need a great deal of flexibility in identifying the services to be delivered and in what mix," said Primus, "and block grants provide that ability."

Horn believes financing can be found in two ways: (1) either through the enhancement or redirection of existing funding streams or (2) the creation of new ones. Three existing sources could be adapted to support fatherhood initiatives: (1) TANF block grants, (2) Title IV funds, and (3) welfare-to-work funding through the Department of Labor.

In addition to the access and visitation dollars that TANF block grants make available, the program was recently expanded to encourage the establishment and maintenance of two-parent households. According to Horn, advocates could argue that support services for low-income, noncustodial fathers should be funded through TANF resources, since they could enhance fathers' commitment to their families and possibly to marriage. Yet, few states have taken advantage of more creative ways to use TANF funding to support fatherhood initiatives.

Title IV funds, as part of federal welfare reform efforts, explicitly encourage states to increase their outreach efforts to unwed fathers for voluntary paternity establishment. These targeted dollars may represent a way to involve CBOs in fatherhood initiatives, since they are better-suited for administering voluntary programs than are large agencies.

While welfare-to-work legislation emphasizes job training and employment services, Horn hopes that, when these programs work with noncustodial fathers, they take very seriously the importance of expanding their efforts to include responsible fatherhood and child support. "Connecting job training and services to family responsibility gives fathers the motivation to stay in jobs longer and eventually seek better jobs," he said.

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Welfare-to-Work

The Balanced Budget Act of 1997 authorized the U.S. Department of Labor to provide Welfare-to-Work Grants to states and local communities to create additional job opportunities for the hardest-to-employ recipients of TANF.

Two types of grants have been distributed: (1) formula grants to states and (2) competitive grants to local communities. A small proportion of the total dollars is set aside for special purposes: 1 percent for Native American tribes, 0.8 percent for evaluation activities, and $100 million in performance bonuses to successful states.

Formula Grants to States. Seventy-five percent of the grant funds are allocated to states, based on a formula that equally considers their share of the nation's low-income citizens and adult recipients of assistance under TANF. States are required to pass through 85 percent of the money to local private industry councils (known as workforce development boards in some areas), which oversee and guide job training programs in geographical jurisdictions. States are allowed to retain 15 percent of the money for welfare-to-work projects of their choice and must match one dollar of non-federal funding for every two dollars of federal funding provided under the formula.

Competitive Grants to Local Communities. Twenty-five percent of funds not allocated by formula are used for competitive grants awarded directly to local governments, private industry councils, and private entities—such as community development corporations and community-based organizations, community action agencies, and other private organizations—that apply in conjunction with a private industry council or local government.

Lynn Jennings from the Department of Labor responded that a significant portion of both the Department's formula and competitive welfare-to-work grants funds services for noncustodial fathers; many of these services offer peer support as well as collaborate with CSE agencies. She also suggested an additional opportunity: the Department's transition from the Jobs Training Partnership Act (JTPA) to the Workforce Investment Act, which will create workforce investment boards at the state and local levels. The boards could look to partner with TANF and CSE agencies as well.

Other existing funding sources include: the Community Service block grant, which includes fatherhood promotion as one eligible activity; U.S. Department of Education mentoring grants and dropout prevention funds for working with teen fathers; Department of Transportation "access to jobs" funding to help noncustodial fathers travel to and from work; and Department of Corrections and juvenile justice monies to work with incarcerated fathers. "The problem in using existing sources of funding," said Horn, "is that you must change the mission of those funding streams in the eyes of the agencies that oversee them and change the perceptions of program participants about their purpose. These kinds of cultural changes are difficult to achieve."

"States and localities are going to need a great deal of flexibility in identifying the father-enabling services to be delivered and in what mix," said Primus, "and block grants provide that ability."

The creation of new funding sources raises different complications. Recently, Republican Congressman Clay Shaw introduced a bill in the U.S. House of Representatives that would provide a $2 billion block grant to states to fund community-based fatherhood promotion programs. Passage of the "Fathers Count" bill may be difficult to achieve, however, because new legislation appropriating dollars for fatherhood initiatives tend to succeed only if they represent truly bipartisan efforts as well as ideologies. Also, Democrats find the bill's allowance to use the funds for marriage promotion to be troublesome.

Given the substantial tax on child support enforcement, Joan Entmacher of the National Women's Law Center raised a question about changing the financing of many traditional social service programs. "Is there any provision in the Fathers Count bill that ensures what fathers pay actually ends up promoting

The Workforce Investment Act of 1998

The Workforce Investment Act of 1998 provides the framework for a national workforce preparation and employment system designed to meet both the needs of the nation's businesses and the needs of job seekers. The legislation is based on the following tenet: training and employment programs must be designed and managed at the local level, where the needs of businesses and individuals are best understood. The Act makes changes to the funding streams, target populations, systems of delivery, and governance structures of the expired Jobs Training Partnership Act (JTPA).

Title I authorizes a new Workforce Investment System, in which state workforce investment boards are established and states develop five-year strategic plans for implementation. Governors designate local "workforce investment areas" and oversee local workforce investment boards. Customers benefit from a "One-Stop" delivery system with career centers in their neighborhoods. They can access core employment services and be referred directly to job training, education, or other services.

Title III amends the Wagner-Peyser Act to require that Employment Service/Job Service activities become part of the "One-Stop" system and establishes a national employment statistics initiative.

the well-being of their children?" While Horn responded that the Fathers Count Act was not specifically designed to support the pass-through, TANF block grants do permit a pass-through of up to 100 percent. "It's a bit surprising to me that the states are not using the opportunities provided by this money to allow a pass-through," he said.

"If we don't use current funding streams or create new ones, the effort is set to fail," said Horn, "because launching new programs for fathers without locating funding invites competition for scarce resources between fathers and mothers, which dooms this field." At a minimum, all social services agencies must be imbued with the sense that fathers matter—helping practitioners to understand not just how to put in place new fatherhood initiatives but also how to promote a new understanding of fathers' need for support.

Exploring Administrative Alternatives. Which agencies at what level should control new or redirected funding? Because comprehensive programs involve funding a broad array of services—employment and training, public job creation, peer support, mediation, education about child support systems, and even child support subsidization—states and local agencies must have a great deal of flexibility to determine what mix of services is required in each community.

According to Primus, if a state provides matching dollars to a federal block grant, then an office or agency at the state level should make the decisions about how the funding is allocated and which components of the service mix are offered. "The governor's cabinet is one possibility for making strategic decisions, but other agencies could actually administer the funding," said Primus. Three types of organizations came to mind: (1) private industry councils (PICs), (2) TANF agencies, and (3) CSE agencies.

Primus sees advantages and disadvantages to all three. "While PICs have the expertise to provide employment services, demonstrations prove that they have difficulty reaching the population of low-income fathers," he said. Although TANF rolls are shrinking, TANF agencies can help to determine the appropriate proportion of employment services offered to both father and mother. CSE agencies exhibit two handicaps: (1) how the client population perceives them and (2) how overburdened they already are. On the other hand, funneling money through CSE agencies can offer close coordination between the employment service provider and child support provision. "Since the purpose of employment services is to enable the father to support his child, this coordinating relationship could serve as the central focus," Primus explained. "CSEs can reward fathers who are working within the system and punish those who are not."

"To create a flexible, community-driven program, we have to do it in a way that gets dollars to local and community-based organizations, allowing the state to set the eligibility requirements," said Goldsmith.

In addition, many local actors also find the dizzying mass of programs and purposes difficult to rationalize. The Honorable Stephen Goldsmith, Mayor of Indianapolis, expressed the frustration that many local officials feel, as agencies and organizations struggle to reconcile the wide range of funding streams (from different levels and areas within government), the restrictions they carry, and the needs of their communities. "For example," Goldsmith said, "PICs have enough funding to provide services, and they're trying to find people who qualify for their funding, while the CSE agencies are trying to find funding for noncustodial parents who want to play the game by the rules. These two pieces of the puzzle just don't match."

The gulf between the population targeted and the actual community in need becomes even more apparent when looking at the numbers. According to Goldsmith, only 340 families are currently eligible for the PIC employment program in Indianapolis, which is supported by the Department of Labor. Yet,

the local CSE prosecutor is dealing with tens of thousands of fathers who need access to job training and placement assistance. "Block grants may work at the state level," he added, "but to create a flexible, community-driven program, we have to do it in a way that gets dollars to local and community-based organizations, allowing the state to set the eligibility requirements."

Although local agencies are more apt to design programs that fit the specific populations served, a question remains: How would the program unfold at the front lines, where the dollars hit the community? "Many of these fatherhood programs are appendages that never become integrated in the work that's accomplished where staff and clients interface," said Elizabeth Blake of the Child Support Enforcement Administration in the state of Maryland. She suggested that funding needs to be earmarked for the education and training of frontline workers to help them understand and implement required cultural changes in practice.

Playing by the Rules: Incentives for Active Participation

QUESTION

Should there be incentives (like the pass-through) within the child support enforcement system and elsewhere to encourage low-income, noncustodial fathers and custodial mothers to "play by the rules"?

COMMENTERS

Diane Fray, Office of Child Support Enforcement, Connecticut Department of Social Services

The Honorable Stephen Goldsmith, Mayor of Indianapolis

In discussing this question, commenters and roundtable participants explored the following four issues: (1) the benefits and resource constraints resulting from the pass-through; (2) other economic incentives beyond the pass-through to encourage fathers' participation; (3) the competing goals and disincentives inherent in the CSE and social services systems; and (4) the need for sensitive, holistic, and community-based supports to meet families' needs and demonstrate the benefits of involvement.

The Pass-Through. As Nancy Ebb of the Children's Defense Fund pointed out, new fatherhood initiatives could be configured to help low-income families grapple with the financial realities of welfare reform, particularly by expanding the pass-through of child support payments to mothers and their children. "Many low-income custodial parents who are forced to go off welfare are not getting the package of support they need, like child support, health care, and child care subsidies, to help them maintain employment," she said. "There is high rate of return to welfare, and a lack of child support is one of the key indicators of returning. We need to make sure that more child support dollars pass through to families while they are both on and off welfare."

New fatherhood initiatives could help low-income families grapple with the financial realities of welfare reform by expanding the pass-through of child support payments to mothers and their children.

In fact, the current CSE system may prove to undermine any attempts to expand services to include fatherhood initiatives. "It's hard to think that services are going to work, when the tax rate on child support enforcement is 75 to 100 percent, and dads are expected to pay around 30 percent of their income," Primus said.

The resulting inequity causes fathers and mothers to view the system with suspicion or resentment. Using his earlier example from California, Primus explained how child support reshuffles resources for a mother making $10,000 per year and a father making $10,000 per year. "If the tax rate retains 89 percent of

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a father's child support payment (which represents 38 percent of his income) for the state, the 11 percent that does makes it through to the mother and her two children barely makes up for the father's sacrifice," Primus said. If he actually makes his payments, the non-custodial father must survive on earnings that are 53 percent of the poverty rate, while the custodial mother and her two children live at 134 percent of poverty.

Many of the CSE system's preconditions—such as arrearages, the magnitude of many child support orders, and the issue of state debt for low-income fathers—should be re-examined.

If the provision of additional services is going to make a difference, it is clear that economic incentives for the father should be built into the child support system. "If more child support can be passed through to the children, it changes the dynamic of the relationship between the father and mother," said Primus, who also supports subsidizing the payment of child support by low-income dads. "It's amazing that, in the Parents' Fair Share Demonstration, they collected 18 percent of the income of dads making 85,000 per year. Yet, very little of those contributions probably made a true difference in the lives of their children." A subsidy could both relieve some of the burden on low-income fathers, providing an incentive for compliance, and offer a level of support with the potential to improve a child's standard of living.

Diane Fray of Connecticut's Office of Child Support Enforcement described how her state uses a 100 percent pass-through as an incentive to move custodial parents from dependence on assistance to self-sufficiency. "They need to see what life can be like with child support coming into the family. It helps them to understand what life will be like when assistance will end, because it will end," she said. The Office is also trying to educate parents about the benefits of working. "We want them to understand why work is benefiting them and their children—not the state," said Fray.

Other Economic Incentives. To identify other incentives for fathers to meet their child support obligations and participate in fatherhood initiatives, many of the system's preconditions—such as arrearages, the magnitude of many child support orders, and the issue of state debt for low-income fathers—should be re-examined. Primus suggested that other incentives, such as preferencing fathers over men without children for places in publicly-funded job training programs, could also play a role in expanded fatherhood initiatives. Primus believes that, by closely linking employment and training programs to the CSE system and to child support payments, such preferences would avoid creating an unintended incentive—for men to become fathers in order to gain access to training services.

Participants also addressed the disincentives currently in place for fathers and mothers of children to marry. "We need to incorporate marriage bonuses in programs such as food stamps, TANF, and the EIC tax credits to encourage families to live together, rather than providing more resources if mothers and fathers live apart," said Primus. "Such an approach would also allow us to subsidize the payment of child support without creating bad economic incentives not to marry."

Competing Goals and Disincentives. In many ways, fatherhood initiatives are being sown in unfit soil—competing goals and, hence, conflicting incentives evident in the CSE system make the programs difficult to implement. Goldsmith, who has 20 years of experience in the CSE system, expressed his frustration with the contradictions, identifying two areas that translate into disincentives for parents who want to "play by the rules."

His first concern centered around the transition from AFDC to TANF, which he believes is still so focused on the concerns of mothers that it could perpetuate the existing tensions between custodial and noncustodial parents. "There is a group of men who still need long-term support, and TANF is still

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focused on moms, so that all of our programs' targets are distorted as a result." Goldsmith believes that TANF guidelines promote both imbalances in terms of eligibility and obstacles to repairing the relationship between the mother and father.

Fatherhood initiatives are being sown in unfit soil—competing goals and, hence, conflicting incentives evident in the CSE system make the programs difficult to implement.

As an example, Goldsmith described a project in Indianapolis, called the Father's Resource Center, which offers support, mentoring, job training, and placement assistance for noncustodial dads. He said, "One of the participants explained to me how his AFDC obligations were interfering with plans for improving his opportunities. This father said, 'the mom and I both agree that it's better for me to go back to school, but I owe you a lot of money, and I can't afford it and the child support enforcement obligations require that I work so many hours a week.' Here was a dad who had evolved from a really bad attitude due to a more comprehensive service program, and we're still in the middle of his life, rearranging the relationship between him and the mom."

Second in Goldsmith's list of conflicting goals is what he sees as an artificial division between public and private at the federal, state, and local levels. "We need to rethink the role of some of these agencies," he said. "An agency's role might not be in delivering services, but determining eligibility and arranging services. Many of the Title IV agencies are so busy doing what they're doing, that it's difficult to stand back and create the support services necessary for the dad who wants to play by the rules." To create such support services, continued Goldsmith, CSE agencies should consider outsourcing the responsibility, becoming the organizer of resources rather than the service provider.

Jim Levine of the Families and Work Institute raised a question about conflicting definitions of what a successful community-based program entails. "For many CBOs, success means that a father has been through the program nine times—he keeps coming back, because he sees the program as providing the support structure he never had from his family," Levine said. "Yet, the state doesn't want to keep funding for someone who repeats their participation, because, to them, they've already been through the program." The problem with longer-term services involves rationalizing public dollars and accounting systems with a community's realities.

Toward Sensitive, Holistic, and Community-Based Supports. As Monahan suggested at the onset of this discussion, the notion of "playing by the rules" is more specifically stated as "parents attending to the set of obligations and responsibilities that include legal, emotional, and financial support for their children." Yet, in order for parents to meet that set of expectations, fatherhood and parenting programs must also support the range of needs exhibited by parents.

Goldsmith reminded participants that public officials and agencies must be careful when designing such holistic supports, avoiding the assumption that their perspective matches that of their clients. "Not all dads are going to be good dads, and we have to find a way to more sensitively provide triage for that population," said Goldsmith. He gave an example of a well-intentioned but poorly received idea he had while serving as a CSE prosecutor: "I thought it would be great to give dads credit for babysitting their kids, but when I spoke to the moms, 80 percent said, 'Absolutely not. I don't want this guy near my child.' We really need to be sensitive in how we design and deliver these programs by speaking to individual moms and dads and determining what's best for each family or community."

Goldsmith also suggested taking a broader perspective in designing support programs, particularly those involving a work component. First, agencies need to carefully balance work, child support, and other responsibilities when setting guidelines. "One of our fathers, who really

wants to play by the rules, said his employer only allows him to work 24 hours per week in his day job, because if he worked more he would have to receive benefits, so he took a job at a restaurant at night to make up the balance," said Goldsmith. "Yet, he's also trying to pay his child support, and the complexity of making a series of entry-level jobs successful is difficult for both fathers and the agencies."

For parents to meet expectations about their responsibilities to children, fatherhood and parenting programs must also support the range of needs exhibited by parents.

In addition to keeping fathers' responsibilities in mind, agencies should also design workforce programs that address a broader range of needs, follow dads over longer periods of time, and provide the sustained support necessary for success. "Because of the changing nature of the workforce, social services cannot just place a father in a job. Instead, to boost chances for success, these dads need to be managed for at least one year," Goldsmith said. Since the needs of fathers might be different for different groups of dads, Goldsmith believes that the most successful programs will be run by CBOs that have flexibility over the money they administer and are able to provide the right mix of services. These community groups would be better able to follow participants closely over a longer period of time, while states could retain the role of establishing eligibility.

Implications for Policymaking

As panelists and participants discussed the intersection of welfare reform, child support enforcement, and emerging fatherhood initiatives, they identified a series of recommendations for generating support for and promoting the establishment of father-enabling programs. This section provides an account of the results of their discussion.

The roundtable's recommendations include the following: (1) aligning fatherhood initiatives with governors' current policy agendas; (2) taking advantage of the ample federal funding being allocated to states; (3) broadening the field's understanding of how legislatures work to help gain support for father-enabling programs; (4) refining the presentation of rationales for fatherhood initiatives in order to garner support; (5) avoiding partisanship when advocating a proposed program; (6) dealing with an emerging focus on policies that reach a broader segment of the population; and (7) working toward consensus in the field of fathers and families by broadening the debate itself.

Aligning Fatherhood Initiatives with Governors' Hot-Button Policy Issues

As decision-making and dollars for social services continue to devolve to the state level, governors become critical in gaining political and financial support for fatherhood initiatives tied to welfare reform and other family social services.

While there has been little discussion of child support enforcement or fatherhood in the context of welfare reform, the time is ripe for initiating this discussion with state leadership. According to Evelyn Ganzglass of the National Governors' Association, most incumbent governors have not connected these issues in their agendas; however, as part of their broader support for early childhood initiatives, some states have earmarked early childhood dollars for father education.

Opportunities also exist to educate the nation's 14 new governors, who have not been embroiled in the history of welfare reform, on the importance of linking this effort with fatherhood initiatives. In addition, a gubernatorial focus on promoting community-based supports, decentralized decision-making, and coordinated services within states provides a strong framework for discussions around the implementation of fatherhood initiatives at the local level.

The marriage of welfare reform and workforce development at the federal level provides an opportunity to make the case for fatherhood initiatives to state leadership.

According to Ganzglass, the marriage of welfare reform and workforce development at the federal level provides an opportunity to make the case for fatherhood initiatives to state leadership. In fact, the next round of welfare reform efforts will center on system coordination activities based in the Workforce Investment Act. "Welfare reform has been a rallying point for revisions in the social services system that has gone beyond changes in public assistance," Ganzglass said. "Much of the coordination with workforce systems is being driven by broader discussions of working poor issues, representing opportunities for introducing concerns over low-income fathers."

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Taking Advantage of the Ample Funds Flowing Into State Coffers—and the Flexibility They Provide

States are awash in funding. Substantial support—including TANF dollars, welfare-to-work money, and workforce investment funds—is available to launch programs that assist low-income families. "In the case of TANF, dollars must be spent on family 'welfare' broadly defined, and that certainly includes the welfare of fathers," said Jack Tweedie of the National Conference on State Legislatures. "Given the money that is currently available, we don't need another federal block grant to begin fatherhood and family initiatives. States can rely on what they have now."

When making a case for fatherhood initiatives, advocates must have a sense of the arguments that will compel each set of decision-maker—essentially, telling the same story in different kinds of ways.

Since many state legislatures are investigating new ways to reinforce and broaden welfare reform, lawmakers and officials may see fatherhood programs that strengthen supports for families without increasing public assistance as a natural evolution on a theme. "This is a tremendous time of opportunity for welfare reform and fatherhood programs," Tweedie said. "There are clear needs and there are resources—that's a situation we don't always have in human services. States are looking for good ideas and new ways to invest the welfare money they have, and the potential is great for gaining the interest of legislators."

States are also becoming more flexible in their conception of service delivery. Through their experience with welfare reform, many have come to rely more heavily on community-based groups, nonprofit organizations, and even for-profit companies for service delivery and coordination. "States are more willing to spend their money through other means," said Tweedie, "and fatherhood programs fit the bill."

Broadening the Field's Understanding of How Legislatures Work

Tweedie stressed the importance of improving advocates' knowledge of the legislative process, particularly in the appropriations arena. While legislatures "develop" programs, most are actually driven by the appropriations process, rather than the converse. Stated simply, money is first allotted, and then the program's standards are set. Advocates need to know where and when to lobby for fatherhood initiatives.

"The way the appropriations process works is through the committee," said Tweedie. "In order to get the money allocated in the first place, you need to find a sponsor who is strongly committed to the program. You want that person to have a place at the committee table, or at least the ear of someone at the table." If the program faces little opposition, a well-connected sponsor can be instrumental in helping to allocate resources toward a new initiative.

Honing the Message

How can advocates of fatherhood initiatives avoid the crippling effects of political resistance? In general, legislators tend to disfavor noncustodial fathers, assuming that, when they fail to pay child support, they either have the resources and refuse to meet their obligations or cannot meet those obligations because they are simply irresponsible.

The key to gaining broad support is to keep appeals bipartisan and ensure there is room for everyone under the movement's tent.

However, Tweedie believes that "selling" these programs to state legislatures and leadership is possible, if advocates develop the appropriate pitch for every audience. "What a governor, executive staff member in charge of policy development, legislator, or legislative committee staff member wants to hear can be com-

pletely different," Tweedie said. When making a case for fatherhood initiatives, advocates must have a sense of the arguments that will compel each set of decision-maker—essentially, telling the same story in different kinds of ways. Advocates of these programs must:

1. Show legislators that there is a group of fathers who are unable to pay financial support to their children, but want to. By relying on the testimony of fathers at committee meetings, rather than impersonal statistics, advocates can affect how legislatures consider these constituents.

2. Tie fatherhood programs to welfare reform, in part because the funding is there, in part because such ties incorporate the goal of making families self-sustaining into the reform, and in part because doing so seals the glaring gap of helping mothers and custodial parents find work, but not noncustodial dads.

3. Focus on the program's ability to increase family members' responsibilities and to strengthen the family itself, both of which are key issues in today's state legislatures. While marriage is a popular topic, advocates can frame programs as addressing family responsibilities beyond marriage, including the financial and emotional support of children.

4. Identify the benefits for legislators, which include an increase in the number of fathers who can pay child support and help their families remain self-sustaining. However, advocates should be careful not to proffer promises and percentages that cannot be achieved.

Avoiding Partisanship

The character of a publicly funded fatherhood or family initiative directly relates to the political ideology of the sponsor. Social conservatives tend to focus on two-parent families, marriage, and the reduction of out-of-wedlock births using strategies such as public awareness activities and changing tax, marriage, and divorce policies. On the other hand, social liberals tend to target at-risk populations, employment and training supports, the criminal justice system, and welfare reform. The key, according to Ganzglass, to gaining broad support is to keep appeals bipartisan and ensure there is room for everyone under the movement's tent. According to Tweedie, this task is less daunting than it might seem. "Despite different takes on their specific purpose, fatherhood initiatives tend to be seen as bipartisan or nonpartisan ideas. Conservatives and liberals do share common goals, such as strengthening families and helping them to become self-sufficient."

Dealing with an Emerging Push for Broad-Based Policies

A new take on the issue of equity is being hotly debated in state legislatures—whether programs that draw upon public dollars should address the needs of a broad segment of the population or zero-in on the concerns of a specific group. Research recommends that programs target specific populations to achieve higher returns on the investment and result in more effective programming, while many policymakers and legislators are advocating a movement away from more narrowly focused initiatives.

For years, federal JTPA dollars provided employment and training services to low-skill, low-income fathers. The programs were far from successful. Evaluations determined that they had been particularly ineffectual for those

who most needed their services. The new Workforce Investment Act replaces JTPA, which focused almost exclusively on serving low-income citizens. The new Act casts its net more broadly, providing universal job search, placement, and training services for all workers at all skill levels. Given this more universal approach, the question remains whether the new system will reach—and truly assist—those who are hardest to serve. By extension, how can fatherhood initiatives build on a program whose fundamental design does not address the needs of low-income, noncustodial dads?

Research recommends that programs target specific populations to achieve higher returns on the investment and result in more effective programming, while many policymakers and legislators are advocating a movement away from more narrowly focused initiatives.

Working Toward Consensus in the Field by Broadening the Debate

Fatherhood initiatives sit at a tricky nexus: while the perspectives of legislators, researchers, practitioners, and activists meet around this issue, the convergence is hardly free of controversy. As Michael Laracy of the Annie E. Casey Foundation looked back on this and a prior roundtable on the same topic one year ago, he was struck by the common ground that many participants who hold radically different ideologies have found. "In the intervening year, there has been an important coalescence of the fatherhood movement, of child support enforcement, and of the matrix of issues that they deal with," said Laracy. "And, although there is still valid disagreement, there is now a willingness to engage around these issues that promises to be enormously productive."

While, a few years ago, participants debated whether fatherhood programs had a place in child support enforcement, the current discussion dealt with issues of implementation—what agency, at the local level, should administer a block grant for father-enabling services? While answers to that question may still differ, the fact that it could be raised at all represents significant progress.

Laracy sees the field as well-positioned to inform the pending debate on federal fatherhood and family legislation surrounding the Shaw bill, which promotes more conservative notions of fatherhood and marriage, and a forthcoming Democratic response, which will undoubtedly reflect a different set of values.

Fatherhood initiatives sit at a tricky nexus: while the perspectives of legislators, researchers, practitioners, and activists meet around this issue, the convergence is hardly free of controversy.

Laracy also suggested that, at this ripe moment, the field should consider reframing the debate: from mother- or father-supporting services, to comprehensive and coordinated parent-supporting services; from reforming "welfare" to proactively designing programs that strengthen families; and from distinctions between economic and emotional support to services that unite the two.

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Directions for Research

Question

What evidence is still needed to convince constituencies focused on welfare, child, and family support to generate policy around the role, funding, and incentives of the CSE system?

Panelists

Evelyn Ganzglass, National Governors' Association

Jack Tweedie, National Conference on State Legislatures

Deborah Weinstein, Children's Defense Fund

Panelists and participants discussed this question to determine new directions for research in the field of fathers and families. The following section summarizes their recommendations.

The roundtable identified the following avenues for new scholarship to pursue: (1) investigate barriers to employment and self-sufficiency; (2) recognize the difficulties facing minority and low-income fathers; (3) articulate the inconsistencies in the CSE and social services systems; (4) measure the cost-effectiveness of comprehensive service models; (5) determine the role that peer support plays in fatherhood initiatives; (6) find ways to develop common missions across agencies; (7) identify how different services should be targeted for different families; and (8) consider how to coordinate services for custodial and noncustodial parents.

Investigate Barriers to Employment and Self-Sufficiency

In the recent report *Welfare to What?*, the Children's Defense Fund found that current or recently former welfare recipients exhibit an extremely limited earning potential. Only 8 percent of this group had achieved an income level above the poverty line. Even the earnings of an entire family do not guarantee family-supporting wage levels: only one in five households with current or recent former welfare recipients earn wages above the poverty line.

Researchers must continue to uncover and explore the barriers to employment for both low-income custodial mothers and noncustodial fathers. Which obstacles present the most significant challenges for low-income parents? Do non-work-related concerns such as limited access to transportation and child care prevent parents' ability to meet their obligations at work? Is training in occupation-specific skills sufficient, or do low-income parents require training in behavioral skills as well? According to Deborah Weinstein of the Children's Defense Fund, answers to questions such as these could inform both new fatherhood initiatives and welfare reform implementation efforts.

Researchers must continue to uncover and explore the barriers to employment for both low-income custodial mothers and noncustodial fathers.

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Recognize the Difficulties Facing Minority and Low-Income Fathers

While fatherhood programs need to help fathers understand their responsibilities to children, researchers, practitioners, and policymakers must make an effort to document how many fathers—particularly minority and low-income dads—arrived at their current predicaments. "Racial stratification and inequities are not topics I often hear in these discussions," said Edward Chisolm of the Chatham-Savannah Youth Futures Authority. He believes that researchers have a responsibility to address institutional racism in order to inform initiatives for low-income fathers. Chisolm called for an investigation, for example, of the disproportionate impact on racial and ethnic minorities of mandatory sentencing policies for crimes involving drugs, as well as the repeal of affirmative action policies and the dismantling of remedial education programs at the postsecondary level, which limit minority students' access to higher education and hence to higher-wage jobs.

Practitioners agree that the system can work in ways that actually inhibit a father's ability to contribute to the well-being of his children.

Articulate Inconsistencies in the System

Most practitioners agree that the system can work in ways that actually inhibit a father's ability to contribute to the well-being of his children: the high rate of taxation on his child support payments, which prevents most or all of his contribution from reaching his child; average earnings calculations that do not account for seasonal, contract, or commission work; incarceration rather than job search and training assistance for fathers who can't—but are willing—to pay; and for many fathers the necessity of working excessive hours to afford both their families' and their own well-being, which often precludes the ability to provide nonfinancial support. Most importantly, when considering initiatives for noncustodial parents, it would be tragic to repeat the mistakes of AFDC by recreating the disincentive that keeps mothers and fathers apart. Could research inform the design of fatherhood initiatives that support children with noncustodial fathers but do not promote the maintenance of separate households?

Measure the Cost-Effectiveness of Comprehensive Service Models

The Parents' Fair Share (PFS) Demonstration—a comprehensive program that provided peer support, employment and training services, mediation, and enhanced child support enforcement for noncustodial fathers at seven sites around the United States—represents a milestone for emerging fatherhood initiatives. Ginger Knox of the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC) identified several directions for future research that emerged from the program's evaluation. Two of the key issues are: (1) whether, given its range of services, the PFS model is a cost-effective way to increase child support collections; and (2) whether monetary payments decreased or increased informal payments that fathers might have already been making. MDRC will continue to explore the outcomes of PFS, but other researchers and practitioners must begin to document the successes and failure of new fatherhood initiatives as they emerge as well.

Determine the Role that Peer Support Plays in Fatherhood Initiatives

What aspects of peer support are most effective at strengthening families and achieving other program goals? Practitioners require a base of knowledge on the variations in peer support to identify best practices for fatherhood programs. Does it matter whether a peer

support component is voluntary? Are there specific ways of structuring the groups that work better than others? Do peer support groups have the potential to help custodial and noncustodial parents work together? Though anecdote attests that these activities can be highly effective in providing fathers with positive role models, shared experiences, and opportunities for identification, quantifying their success is a difficult task. Can evaluation research inform how these peer programs could be assessed to communicate their impact more effectively?

New, noncustodial fathers not yet in arrears for failing to pay child support could still require employment and training services—and it would be beneficial to the new mother and child, as well as more cost-effective, to provide these services before financial and emotional rifts appear.

Find Ways to Develop Common Missions Across Agencies

When proposing to provide a comprehensive set of services in any fatherhood initiative, identifying how all of the agencies involved can work toward the same goals—and from the same perspective—is a critical challenge. How can policy research help programs accomplish more than the coordination of activities among varying agencies? What are the most promising examples of true service integration? Has welfare reform taught bureaucratic state agencies any lessons about working with more nimble community-based organizations?

Identify How Different Services Should Be Targeted for Different Families

Given the different perspectives of the range of agencies involved and the mix of services provided, is offering the "full package" to every family always the best option? New, noncustodial fathers not yet in arrears for failing to pay child support could still require employment and training services—and it would be beneficial to the new mother and child, as well as more cost-effective, to provide these services before financial and emotional rifts develop. Is there a way to target peer support, employment and training services, and child support enforcement so that participants can selectively access only the services they need?

Consider How to Coordinate Services for Custodial and Noncustodial Parents

"While we worry about how to coordinate services across agencies, trying to coordinate a program that involves both custodial and noncustodial parents is daunting to say the least," said Knox. In the end, however, children should benefit most from coordinated intervention for each parent—or, at the very least, promoting loosely integrated, rather than distinctly separate, interventions for different parents of the same child. Researchers should work to provide evidence to guide program design. Could theories on conflict management strategies be applied in these program components?

Lessons for Practice

Question:

What do we know in the areas of research and policy that can strengthen practice?

Panelists:

Edward Chisolm, Chatham-Savannah Youth Futures Authority

Ginger Knox, Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation

Geraldo Rodriguez, Central Maravilla Service Center, Los Angeles Department of Community and Senior Services

Panelists and participants discussed this question to identify lessons for practitioners and program design. The following section summarizes their conclusions.

The roundtable identified the following lessons: (1) truly holistic and community-focused approaches work best; (2) it is possible to increase fathers' child support payments; (3) increasing child support payments does make a difference in the lives of children; (4) current pass-through policies discourage fathers from complying with child support orders; (5) recalcitrant fathers can be persuaded to attend their child support hearings; (6) job placement and training services alone are insufficient for ensuring the employment success of low-income fathers; (7) effective service coordination promotes improved outcomes; (8) a dual focus on programs for both parents is essential; and (9) stricter time limitations on the receipt of benefits makes the identification of viable programs for fathers and mothers a critical issue.

Truly Holistic and Community-Focused Approaches Work Best

In most cases, improving practice requires integrating a community's needs into program design. Chisolm reminded participants that the popular slogan adopted by the Clinton Administration, "It takes a village to raise a child," is actually an African proverb that places the responsibility of a child's future on every member of a community. Through his work with the Annie E. Casey Foundation, he has discovered that the notion begs a broader question in the American context: "What does it take to raise a village?" According to Chisolm, "The issue is not just about developing families, but about developing larger networks within distressed communities. Social services policy in the United States has not given adequate attention to this issue." Chisolm believes it is insufficient to talk simply about reforming a system; instead, conversations around fathers, families, and social services must involve strategies for developing the capacities of an entire community. To achieve such a goal, practitioners and agency officials must keep their perspectives grounded. "In this profession, you have to keep yourself abreast and aware of what the people you are serving are actually thinking and feeling," said Chisolm.

Taking such a holistic approach requires that the system be sensitive to the realities and cultures of those it serves. "That means changing the status quo, working with community-based organizations, power-sharing, understanding how the communities arrived at their present condition," said Chisolm. Further, when practitioners discuss issues around family formation and support, they must take into account the cultures of their clients. "We have to deal

with the structural barriers that are keeping men, particularly African-American men, from succeeding. They are inherent in the social service policies implemented over the last 30 years," he said.

For Latino and immigrant fathers whose first language is not English, fundamental communication problems pose serious barriers to successful engagement with the system—not to mention the provision of additional supports such as job training, education, and employment. "In Los Angeles, 22 percent of the population involved in our program were monolingual Spanish-speaking clients," said Geraldo Rodriguez of the Central Maravilla Service Center in the Los Angeles Department of Community and Social Services. "We had to change our entire operations in order to address this special need for fathers. Our frontline workers couldn't even help them to understand how the system worked, much less gain access to services."

It is insufficient to talk simply about reforming a system; instead, conversations around fathers, families, and social services must involve strategies for developing the capacities of an entire community.

Rodriguez explained how culturally specific concerns even affected the number and location of the sites his agency established as part of the Parents' Fair Share Demonstration. "We needed to set up five sites because we knew from our colleagues working in the trenches that some fathers weren't going to come into an agency if they had to cross certain boundaries that weren't within the confines of their communities," said Rodriguez. "Run-ins with the law or gang affiliations really dictated where these fathers could venture. There are unwritten rules and observations that, if we did not address them, would have doomed the program to failure."

It Is Possible to Increase Fathers' Child Support Payments...

Results of the Parents' Fair Share Demonstration indicate that, by changing the way an agency works directly with fathers, it is indeed possible to increase the percentage who meet their child support obligations. At the end of the first 18 months of the demonstration's follow-up, the most successful site experienced an 11-percentage point increase in the proportion of dads making payment. In dollars, this program achieved an average increase of $300 for each father's payment over the course of the follow-up. While the gains are modest, practitioners can learn some lessons from the Parents' Fair Share model.

What did the most successful programs do right? The initial increase in child support enforcement that first involved fathers in the program, as well as the follow-up support services and enforcement that occurred after they completed it, played a role in increasing child support payments. In addition, by coupling services with enforcement, the program helped to distinguish between fathers who were unable and those who were unwilling to pay. If a father was genuinely not employed, the model's services could help him to get back on his feet; if he was employed, enhanced enforcement helped to ensure he would pay. No matter what a father's situation, the system was equipped to deal with him more effectively than if the services were not in place.

...And Increasing Child Support Payments *Does* Make a Difference

New York's Child Assistance Program serves as a prime example of how it is possible to move families off the welfare rolls, when child support collections are sustained and raise a family's resources above the poverty line. "If you stabilize peoples' lives through added income, it becomes clear that smaller financial problems, like needing to fix a car, are less likely to become major

Because child support was still heavily taxed by the state and only a small percentage of the payments passed through to the families, the impact of the model's innovations were muted by an incompatible system.

financial problems, like losing your job because you don't have a car to get there," said Weinstein. Giving families the benefit of child support income through the pass-through to augment their own income can be beneficial for both families and the state.

Yet, Current Pass-Through Policies Make Fathers' Participation a "Tough Sell"

In part, the purpose of the peer support groups offered within the Parents' Fair Share Demonstration was to allow fathers to discuss aspects of the formal system and promote the notion that it was a "good idea" for fathers to make their support payments. Because child support was still heavily taxed by the state and only a small percentage of the payments passed through to the families, the impact of the model's innovations were muted by an incompatible system. "We found that the only way the program made sense to our fathers was that it served as a way to get the system off their backs," said Knox. "They didn't see their participation as a way to improve the lives of their children, because they still didn't see their dollars reaching their kids."

Certain Strategies Do Reach the Unreachable

New fatherhood programs must develop methods for reaching the large proportion of fathers who simply refuse the call to appear in the first place. The Parents' Fair Share Demonstration site in Dayton, Ohio, adopted the practice of performing home visits two days before a father's scheduled hearing to serve as an in-person reminder of their obligations. A direct result of this innovative strategy, the percentage of fathers appearing at hearings in Dayton that year increased from 41 to 69 percent.

Employment and Job Training Services Alone Are Insufficient

The Parents' Fair Share evaluation found that more participants engaged in job search activities than in skills training and that none of the sites showed an increase in employment rates, at least within the first 18 months after fathers completed the program. It is clear that, for the majority of low-income fathers, finding a job is not always the problem; the difficulty is in obtaining one that pays a family-supporting wage and enables them to stay employed for a consistent period of time. In addition, fatherhood programs must not only provide support for the nonwork-related issues that interfere with good work histories—such as limited access to transportation—but also follow fathers over the long-term to help sustain their efforts.

Effective Service Coordination Promotes Improved Outcomes

Parents' Fair Share sites that were able to improve child support collections also demonstrated exemplary coordination among the project's organizational partners. The factors that contributed to successful collaboration included: exhibiting strong leadership and commitment within each agency; having the child support enforcement agency act as a fully participating partner in the program; and focusing, at the outset, on articulating a common mission and

Fatherhood programs must not only provide support for the nonwork-related issues that interfere with good work histories—such as limited access to transportation—but also follow fathers over the long-term to help sustain their efforts.

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building a cohesive team. The Los Angeles site implemented a unique and highly effective strategy around case conferences, Knox explained. "They conducted regular case conferences with district attorneys, support workers, case managers, employment specialists, and staff from every other relevant agency in one room at the same time talking about a particular father's situation," said Knox. "It made a real difference in the coordination and quality of services provided."

Through the case conferences, the program changed both the attitudes of clients and those of the staff toward their clients. The action plans developed for each father during these conferences benefited from the input of every agency he would engage—and each agency promised not to act outside of that plan. As a result, when a problem arose around a father's interface with one agency, resolving that problem became the concern of the entire group. Because agencies worked in concert, the conferences promoted highly effective service coordination, proving to ease the tensions that occurred among agencies when conflicting perspectives arose in the process of service provision.

Coordinated case conferences promoted highly effective service coordination, proving to ease the tensions that occur across agencies when conflicting perspectives arose in the process of service provision.

A Dual Focus Is Essential

The field is only beginning to identify the array of services required by low-income, noncustodial fathers, after years of neglecting the fact that they need the same supports as custodial mothers. However, some vigilance is necessary to prevent the provision of new services for fathers from coming at the expense of those offered for mothers, particularly since mothers' existing supports are eroding. "At the same time we are recognizing that fathers need education and job training, we are also withdrawing similar services for moms," said Weinstein.

A study released by the General Accounting Office documented the substantial decrease in services in several states. In 1994, 85 percent of Connecticut women on welfare were also enrolled in an education and training program; in 1997, that percentage dropped to 31 percent. In Maryland, similar rates plummeted from 65 percent in 1994 to slightly over 10 percent in 1997. In Wisconsin, those rates were 60 percent and 12 percent, respectively. "Children need the support of both of their parents. Decision-makers and practitioners in this field should be smart enough to hold the needs of both parents in our heads at the same time," said Weinstein. Ultimately, programs need to focus on providing services for parents to help improve the lives of their children.

Mind the Ticking Clock

While federal, state, county, and local officials in a welter of programs and agencies struggle to coordinate funding streams and rally support for fatherhood support services, the clock is ticking for many families. "We need to work in a big hurry to make these systems work together for children," Weinstein said. Welfare reform has established strict time limits on eligibility, and operating without safety nets for mothers, children, and fathers who, in the absence of public assistance, may be left with no means of financial support has grave implications for these families, as well as their communities.

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Roundtable Agenda

Welfare Reform, Fathers, and Families Roundtable
Washington, DC

December 8, 1998

8:30 – 8:45 a.m.	**Overview of Meeting and Introductions** Vivian L. Gadsden, National Center on Fathers and Families Elaine Sorensen, The Urban Institute
8:45 – 9:00 a.m.	**Introduction of Issues** Judge David Gray Ross, Federal Office of Child Support Enforcement
9:00 – 9:45 a.m.	**Question 1: What should the child support enforcement role be in providing enabling services to poor families?** **Moderator:** John Monahan, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services **Commenters:** Dianna Durham-McLoud, National Center for Strategic Non-Profit Planning and Community Leadership Linda Stewart, Secretary of the Department of Workforce Development, State of Wisconsin

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9:45 – 10:30 a.m.	**Question 2: How do you finance enabling services for poor dads? Who should control the funding?** **Moderator:** John Monahan, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services **Commenters:** Wade Horn, National Fatherhood Initiative Wendell Primus, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities
10:30 – 11:15 a.m.	**Question 3: Should there be incentives (like the pass-through) within the child support enforcement system and elsewhere to encourage low-income, noncustodial fathers and custodial mothers to "play by the rules"?** **Moderator:** John Monahan, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services **Commenters:** Diane Fray, Office of Child Support Enforcement, Connecticut Department of Social Services The Honorable Stephen Goldsmith, Mayor of Indianapolis
11:15 – 11:30 a.m.	**Summary**
11:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.	**Lunch**
1:00 – 2:15 p.m.	**Panel 1: What evidence is needed to convince constituencies focused on welfare, child, and family support to move in one direction or another on the issues discussed in the morning session?**

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Moderator: Linda Mellgren, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Panelists: Evelyn Ganzglass, National Governors' Association

Jack Tweedie, National Conference on State Legislatures

Deborah Weinstein, Children's Defense Fund

2:15 – 3:30 p.m.

Panel 2: What else do we need to know in the areas of research and policy to strengthen practice?

Moderator: Barbara Kelley Duncan, Children's Defense Fund

Panelists: Edward Chisolm, Chatham-Savannah Youth Futures Authority

Ginger Knox, Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation

Geraldo Rodriguez, Central Maravilla Service Center, Los Angeles Department of Community and Senior Services

3:30 – 3:45 p.m.

Synthesis of the Issues

Commenter: Michael Laracy, The Annie E. Casey Foundation

3:45 – 4:00 p.m.

Concluding Remarks

Vivian L. Gadsden, National Center on Fathers and Families

Elaine Sorensen, The Urban Institute

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Participant List

Fathers and Families Second-Tier Roundtable Series

Welfare Reform, Fathers, and Families Roundtable

December 8, 1998

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